

MAYOR SHARPE JAMES

Newark, New Jersey

Promising — and delivering — a “Sharpe change for Newark,” Sharpe James was elected mayor of Newark on May 13, 1986 and was sworn into office on July 1 of that year. He was the first Newark mayor to run unopposed when he sought re-election in 1990.

While helping the City of Newark win the Most Livable City, the All-America City, and the Environmental Protection Agency's Administrator's Awards (James refers to the three awards as the “triple crown”), Mayor James inspired the creation of the public/private partnerships which are largely responsible for the City's growth and revitalization.

During the James' administration, bond rates and housing stock numbers have risen, as well as city revenue because of the increased collections for water bills and taxes, and fines for parking and traffic violations. At the same time, many affordable housing complexes have been built and many businesses have relocated or expanded in Newark.

Cultural revitalization has also received a tremendous boost during the James Administration, with Mayor James leading the campaign for a \$250 million, 2,500-seat New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) scheduled to open October 17, 1997. It is expected that the NJPAC will provide the anchor for a new, Newark night-life where one can be surrounded by wealth, art and culture; go shopping nearby; eat at a restaurant, and relax in an area hotel. Residential, commercial and recreational development along Newark's Passaic Riverfront will also be spurred by the Art Center.

Just as important, the James Administration has been responsible for laws that have made the City of Newark an environmental role model. Following the motto “Think Globally...Act Locally,” Newark has adopted laws that have given the City a recycling rate of 57 percent, banned the production and sale of ozone-depleting chemicals and prohibited the use of non-biodegradable plastics in food packaging.

First elected to public office in 1970 as South Ward Councilman, Mayor James won re-election on the first ballot in 1974 and 1978, when he ran unopposed. In 1982, he was elected councilman-at-large.

Sharpe James is the 35th mayor of New Jersey's largest city. Mayor James has compiled an impressive number of “firsts.” He is the first councilman to be elected mayor, and only the second African-American elected mayor of Newark. James was a professor at Essex County College where he was the first African-American to serve as department chairman and athletic director. He also served as vice-president and then president of the Garden State Athletic Conference (GSAC).

A native of Jacksonville, Florida, where he was born on February 20, 1936, Sharpe James has lived most of his life in Newark. A graduate of Miller Street School, South Side High School (now Malcolm X Shabazz), and Montclair State University, he earned a master's degree from Springfield College. He received the 1961 Department of Physiology Award from that university, and he has completed advanced studies at Washington State, Columbia, and Rutgers Universities. In 1988, he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Laws degree from Montclair State University and, in 1991, an Honorary Doctorate from Drew University.

Before joining the faculty at Essex County College, he was a Newark public school teacher for seven years. During that time, he coached city, county, and state championship track and cross-country teams. He also served with the U.S. Army in Europe.

Mayor James has been heavily involved in presidential campaigns, beginning in 1980 when he was co-chair of the Essex County Committee to elect Ted Kennedy and served as delegate whip at the Democratic National Convention. In 1988, he chaired the Jesse Jackson for President Campaign, and in 1992, he co-chaired New Jersey's Clinton-Gore campaign.

His dedication to the City of Newark is demonstrated by the fact that Mayor James is currently on the Board of Trustees of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, a vice-president of the New Jersey Conference of Mayors and is a past president of the National League of Cities.

In addition to his many other honors, Mayor James was named one of the nation's “Ten Best Dressed Men” of 1987, and in 1992, he was voted “The Most Valuable Public Official” in municipal government by City and State Magazine. An avid tennis player, Mayor James ranks as Newark's senior tennis champion and a former New Jersey State Tennis Association champion.

Mayor James resides in Newark's South Ward with his wife Mary and his three sons: John, Elliott, and Kevin.

